The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

MEL CHATMAN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: October 2, 2006

Q: Today is the 2nd of October 2006. This is an interview with Melvin R. Chatman and you go by Mel, is that right?

CHATMAN: That is correct.

Q: Okay, and it is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Mel, let's start kind of at the beginning. When and where were you born?

CHATMAN: Chandler, Oklahoma, September 29th, 1940.

Q: All right, can you tell me...let's start on your father's side. What do you know about your father's side?

CHATMAN: My father grew up in Oklahoma. I'm not sure where he was before Oklahoma. I know that my grandparents and my father and all of his family grew up in Oklahoma in the central Oklahoma area. He and my mother met at college at Langston University and were married in 1939, 1938.

Q: What was your father doing?

CHATMAN: Father was a college student at the time they were married.

Q: What did he get into?

CHATMAN: I don't think he ever graduated from college. I think he got through three years. I think because of the marriage and the pregnancy he dropped out. He and my mother dropped out.

Q: Do you know anything about on your father's side what the family was up to? Were they farmers?

CHATMAN: They were primarily farmers who had gone to Oklahoma like most people who came to Oklahoma at that time to escape the misery of the other parts of the country that were still sort of suffering from the after affects of the Civil War, you know the 50-60 year period where the country was still fighting the Civil War more or less.

Q: On your mothers side the same thing or...?

CHATMAN: My mother's family came from Texas. They migrated from Mississippi and from Louisiana, or excuse me from the Tidewater part of Virginia, the mother did. My grandmother, my mother's mother, was born in Texas and she later moved to Oklahoma with the family where she met her husband, my grandfather and they were married in Chandler, Oklahoma, somewhere around the turn of the century, 19th or 20th century.

Q: Where sort of did your family sort of settle in a particular part of Oklahoma?

CHATMAN: Chandler, Oklahoma was the real focus point. We settled in Oklahoma.

Q: What was this...do you know anything about this? What was it like?

CHATMAN: I've written quite extensively about it. It was the early part of the resettlement effort in Oklahoma. You know Oklahoma was an Indian territory for years and was not a state until 1907. My mother's mother's family came as part of the pioneer, the land rush effort.

Q: The Boomers and the...?

CHATMAN: The Boomers, and the Sooners and the Laters and all that. They came around 1890 and started the family there in Oklahoma. They moved from Texas and then settled in Oklahoma. They settled in Oklahoma because my grandfather, great grandfather, was a Buffalo Soldier and had served in that area during his Buffalo Soldier days and was very familiar with Chandler and as a result of favorable memories about Chandler he decided to try his luck in that part of Oklahoma as opposed to other parts.

Q: Could you explain what a Buffalo Soldier was?

CHATMAN: Buffalo Soldiers after the Civil War was over in 1865 there were several hundreds of Black soldiers who had served in the Union Army. In order to utilize their skills and also to take care of them after the war was over they formed several units that were all Black soldiers.

Q: Like the Tenth Calvary?

CHATMAN: That's one of the units of the Buffalo Soldiers was the Tenth Calvary. They served primarily in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas and those areas to basically do two things: To try and control the people who were the Sooners, who were coming into the land illegally, the white Sooners, and also to help be the policemen for the various Indian tribes who were still not completely under control in those areas.

Q: Did your family have any connection with the Indians at all?

CHATMAN: We were told for years and years until I did my family history that we had Cherokee Indian blood. The results of my history research did not realize...it identified the possibility but not the clear connection between the Indian tribes. My grandmother, my mother's mother, looks one hundred percent American Indian, the straight hair, the sharp nose, the whole bit. But, who her father was is unclear but somewhere she definitely had non-Black blood in her veins.

Q: Because looking at you I would say Indian. I mean of some nature or something like that. What did your father settle down to do and your mother after they left college?

CHATMAN: Father was drafted into the Navy and served at a base in I think was Fresno, California, for several years. My mother joined him there with us as small children and their marriage broke up about 1944-1945. My mother then returned with us to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where other members of the family were already studying at the University of Michigan and that's where we ended up transferring the whole system to Michigan as a result of his educational exercise. One by one all the original family that were born in Oklahoma ended up in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Q: What attracted the family to Ann Arbor?

CHATMAN: The fact that the oldest son who was a very, very bright mathematician had gotten accepted at the University of Michigan in about 1936 or something like that and had turned out to be one of their top students in the area of math. He came there and the next person in line who was ready to go into college came to get his degree from the University of Michigan so it went this way for about six of my mother's nine brothers and sisters. They all ended up at the University of Michigan and resettled in the Michigan area.

Q: Did you live right in Ann Arbor?

CHATMAN: Right in Ann Arbor.

Q: As a kid what was Ann Arbor like?

CHATMAN: Very, very carefree life, very enjoyable small town, segregation but not the segregation that was so predominant in other parts of the country. It was a fairly integrated life in terms of going to integrated schools. I never went to a segregated school except when I was in Oklahoma one year. My other went back to finish her degree in Oklahoma and went in my primary school days, I think in my second grade schooling was in a segregated school. Other than that all my schooling my entire life was integrated.

Q: How did the system work, say in Oklahoma, in segregation but where did the Indians fall into this? I'm just curious.

CHATMAN: The Indians had their own system. The federal government after the Civil War set up the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Affairs had reservations and had Indian schools and everything else specifically for Indians. Some Indians did attend in Oklahoma public schools just as Blacks attended public schools in the first part of Oklahoma's history. It was an integrated school system in the first part of Oklahoma's history. The segregated system came after Oklahoma became a state.

Q: Your basic youth was spent in Ann Arbor?

CHATMAN: In Ann Arbor yes.

Q: You went to school; do you have brothers or sisters?

CHATMAN: I have one brother.

Q: What was your mother doing during...?

CHATMAN: My mother was a dietician at the University of Michigan hospital.

Q: What was home life like?

CHATMAN: Very normal for an American kid. I had mostly my mother's family within arms reach in Ann Arbor so the family thing was there. My father did not live with us while we were in Ann Arbor but I had the presence of all of my uncles, who acted very, very faithfully in his place to make sure that I didn't feel left out as far as not having a father.

Q: And also kept a pretty good eye on you.

CHATMAN: They kept a pretty good eye on my yes.

Q: As a kid did you find you were much of a reader or athletics or what sort of...?

CHATMAN: I found out that I really disliked reading anything for pleasure. I always had the idea of being a great athletic but never had the talent to pursue that. I was always a C player. I could make it as a team player but I could never play very often. I wrestled, I played football, I ran track for a short period of time, but with about the same results. I was a C player; C players don't really see much game action.

Q: I spent an awful lot of time watching the sports on the...

CHATMAN: But I could do everything.

Q: Bench.

CHATMAN: I could do everything, I could play ping-pong, I could swim, I could do it but I was never a team at all.

Q: In school you went to the elementary school except for this short period...

CHATMAN: One year.

Q: How did you find that? Did you feel this was quite different or...?

CHATMAN: Different in what way? Was it...?

Q: You know you had been in integrated schools, of course you hadn't had that much experience it was just one year but did you find...

CHATMAN: The question about the experience in the integrated school or experience in the segregated?

Q: Segregated school, did you?

CHATMAN: No because it was just...it was not a big thing, it was for one year. It was a one, two room schoolhouse with one teacher teaching grades 1 through 8 or something like that and the other teacher teaching the rest of the thing. You saw everybody, it was very friendly and as a matter of fact as recent as three years ago I interviewed as part of my history research one of my teachers from my second grade year. I don't remember any pain or anything unusual about it, I got a good education.

Q: Those small school houses, one, two-room schoolhouses, I went to one in one year in a two-room schoolhouse and the thing worked very well. In fact, I think it worked a little better because you were picking up stuff from the more advanced kids. Was Ann Arbor a small town at that point or not? We are talking about the '50s.

CHATMAN: Ann Arbor was a small town in the '50s; it was probably 20-30 thousand people back then.

Q: How about the influence of the university?

CHATMAN: It was overwhelming just like any major university; the town is the university. It survives because of the university and the university eventually gets anything they want out of the town simply because of the dollar.

Q: Did you find yourself sort of using the campus as a playground or getting involved in things as a kid or not at the university?

CHATMAN: No, but I lived at a house where university students were billeted. At that time the Black women could not live in the dorm system so my aunt whom we lived with was the mother of a house where Black students were housed on behalf of the university. I always lived in the university area, it was not outside the university, we always lived in the middle of the university. So in terms of the demographics of it I lived in the university but I really didn't have any big university association or anything like that as a kid, no.

Q: Well then in school what sort of subjects turned you on and turned you off?

CHATMAN: Well there were none in the first category. I was not, unlike all my relatives, my mother's family and everyone I was not really that great a student and didn't have that much interest. My brother was a much better student than I was. I stayed outside running in the streets, not problem wise, I just liked being out in the streets running around the neighborhood and doing stuff like that. I had a paper route when I was about nine years old, I worked at a bowling alley, I was always doing something. I didn't like staying in the house.

Q: Sort of a mathematical gene didn't hit you or not?

CHATMAN: No and about one-half of my mother's brothers and sisters had the math gene very seriously.

Q: How long did you stay in Ann Arbor?

CHATMAN: Until I was about sixteen, seventeen years old from about five years old until sixteen, seventeen years old.

Q: By the time you got to high school there did you get involved in extra curricular things or not?

CHATMAN: Trying to get in the pants of all the young ladies that were in school, that's about the only extra curricular activity I remember. I played football but as I said I was at the non-significant level. My brother was a beautiful athlete; he was just a natural athlete. I can play every thing at the C-level but that was the end of that.

Q: I'm not sure how when you were in things the timing was there were serious race riots in Detroit and all. Did any of this reflect in Ann Arbor or not?

CHATMAN: The race riots were when I was overseas.

Q: Yeah, I was going to say...

CHATMAN: But I don't think that they reflected the Ann Arbor area. I was overseas. They definitely reflected in Detroit but I don't think there was any problem in Ann Arbor thirty-eight miles away.

Q: Was there any spill over because during the thirties and forties there had been this tremendous exodus from the south of the Blacks from the deep south up to Detroit because of the automobile industry and other types of things. I was wondering whether that reflected itself in Ann Arbor at the university?

CHATMAN: Affected in what way?

Q: Well I mean a considerable number of students.

CHATMAN: I think that the big upsurge of students that came to Ann Arbor after the Second World War were almost entirely GI Bill study. They had nothing to do with that migration effort; it was another group of Blacks. These were primarily the ones who wanted to get into the educational system and had to obviously be pretty good students because the University of Michigan has always been tough and pretty good enrollment requirements. So what you had was a lot of Blacks who wanted to get ahead educationally who came to the University of Michigan because of the GI Bill. I don't think it was because of this other thing.

Q: It wasn't that spill over because of...

CHATMAN: I didn't study there but there was nothing obvious to me. But then there was a different kind of person that came to work in the bomber plants and the car factories later on than you did who came there for education advancement.

Q: Did your mother continue to take in young ladies in?

CHATMAN: This was my aunt. Yes, she did.

Q: It must have been kind of fun for a teenage boy.

CHATMAN: This was before I was a teenage boy this was probably when I was...we lived with her for probably from when I was about I'd say eight or nine years old until I was about maybe thirteen. Then we moved to another house.

Q: This is the wrong time. Well then since you were sort of as you say interested more in getting out doors and in the streets and all this, were they able to tie you down to an education?

CHATMAN: I was always able to pass and get into some of the mid-level educational facilities without much of a problem there but I was never any kind of super student or anything like that.

Q: Where did you graduate from in high school?

CHATMAN: Western Michigan University, it was in Kalamazoo.

Q: Now what did you take there?

CHATMAN: Speech and drama, broadcasting with a minor in broadcasting.

Q: Were you thinking of something as a career?

CHATMAN: I was thinking of going into the stage, acting.

Q: When you were in high school did you get involved in drama?

CHATMAN: No this was a college thing. I had never been involved with it. I had worked at a television station as a cameraman, as a teenager at one of those small very, very tiny local station for a while and got that experience. Then nothing more until I got into college and then by accident almost got into the radio broadcasting business. I was a deejay and was quite, quite successful during my college career and that began leading me into the theatre business.

Q: At Western Michigan what sort of activities were you in?

CHATMAN: I was in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps), which put me into a direction of going overseas. That was probably the reason I started my Foreign Service career. I was broadcasting very, very much and did quite a bit of acting, did summer stock several years.

Q: What sort of plays were you getting involved in?

CHATMAN: Everything, Little Merry Sunshine, what's the one with Sydney Poitier starred in? Raisin in the Sun...

Q: Raisin in the Sun.

CHATMAN: There were several other musicals and things like that I did. I did the Fantastiks, did that, and I am trying to think of the ones that I had significant roles in. As an apprentice you always have some kind of role but I had significant...and also the one what is the one that Helen Keller was...

Q: Oh yeah,

CHATMAN: The Helen Keller Story whatever that was, I was in that; I had a very good role, and some other productions. But as I said, I was a very successful deejay, radio announcer.

Q: Were you thinking as this as a career?

CHATMAN: I was thinking of the theater. I was going to New York at one period of time and try my hand at Broadway but I got assigned as my obligation for my ROTC my two years to Korea and that took me into a world I had never known anything about. That was the beginning of a whole other mind set about where I wanted go as a career.

Q: What was the specialty of the branch of your ROTC that you had?

CHATMAN: Infantry.

Q: When did you go to Korea? You were there from when to when?

CHATMAN: '64-'67.

Q: So a lot of commitment and it was beginning to build up in Vietnam at that time.

CHATMAN: Right, that's when I transferred from Vietnam in '67 to '75.

Q: From Korea.

CHATMAN: From Korea, right.

Q: What were you doing in Korea?

CHATMAN: I was a Platoon leader, a company commander and then a S-5 officer. The S-5 officer was one that goes out and handles the public relations effort for the military to facilitate military operations. That's what my specialty became.

Q: How did you find Korea at the time?

CHATMAN: Oh I had a ball. I just never knew about other people and other cultures and it just fascinated me. Of course, I liked the outdoors, I liked being around people and things like that so I immediately got into the civil affairs business but my main job was to pave the way to develop a good relationship with the local population so that we could successfully carry out military operations. I was very effective at it.

Q: What area of Korea were you in?

CHATMAN: Seoul, Yongsan, which is near Seoul, sort of the mid-level of Korea.

Q: Were you in a division?

CHATMAN: It was the First Cavalry Division.

Q: It was the First Cavalry Division, yeah, which was pulled out later on.

CHATMAN: Right and went to Vietnam I believe because they needed an air mobile division.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Koreans?

CHATMAN: No problem at all. The first thing I did was I learned how to speak Korean, which, of course, facilitated everything. I was there for three years and during that period of time I got a three or something level in Korean and I was able to read and write. This is untested, I'm basing this estimation on the fact that I have a four in Vietnamese and a three in Spanish so I was easily in comparing the other levels a three in Korean, a very easily a three.

Q: Were you during this period or before you got there were you married or not?

CHATMAN: No.

Q: Well did you find...were there problems with your, not so much your unit because your unit would be used to dealing with a civilian population but the regular infantry don't always mix terribly well with another population even an American one being down...?

CHATMAN: Yeah, there were terrible problems both ways and that was what I was good at working with. There were guys, everything from guys wanting to marry the local hooker to people who just could not stand seeing a person with slanted eyes and could not, in many cases, there were people from the south white guys who couldn't really stand being too close to Blacks, so you had a double-whammy in a foreign culture.

Q: Were you seeing some of the problems that of course became really bad later on in Vietnam of sort of the breakdown of military structure? I'm thinking about between officers and race relations and all of that.

CHATMAN: I saw problems but I didn't see any insurmountable problems. There are people who just from both sides who just had extreme difficulties in adjusting to the fact that they had to live in the same room with a person of another color, there were people who just had a problem with that. Of course me being a Black officer too sort of set me up for that same thing. I never, as far as me being aware, was never aware of that being a problem in being a leader in the military. I think that I had strong NCO (non-commissioned officers) and other people who were a part of the system that completely neutralized that they were neutralized by the NCOs and the other people did not have that same problem.

Q: During the time you were there was there a feeling that war could break out at any time?

CHATMAN: Where are you talking about in Vietnam?

Q: In Korea.

CHATMAN: No, no I don't think so. You kept a hype about them coming across the 38th parallel, that was part of the deal but I don't think anybody ever thought that was going to happen, at least I didn't feel it.

Q: Did you have much dealings with the Korean military (ROK)?

CHATMAN: I eventually became an advisor to the ROK army in Vietnam; my first assignment in Vietnam was with the liaison, the U.S. military liaison office that worked with the Korean's because I could speak Korean. So yes I did and also I did have KATUSA (Korean augmentation to the U.S. army), which were Korean augmentation to the U.S. military. We had those people integrated into our company.

Q: This was carried over from, of course, the Korean War when they were first I think started.

CHATMAN: Okay, I'm not sure where it first started but...

Q: Yeah, I mean it was started then...

CHATMAN: That was always a problem because the KATUSAs had a problem being away from their own culture, eating American food, it was a whole bunch of things that went into that. They were excellent soldiers when you treated them right but a lot of people did not have the skills to deal with that and you know you needed people who understood what was going on and people with patience.

Q: How did you find the military experience? It sounds like you adapted very well.

CHATMAN: I did but I was pretty convinced that by the time I got a couple years in Vietnam that I didn't really have a future in the military. Number one is that first of all, that life style was not what I was as comfortable with as I was with some other life styles and it was very obvious that the military was being scaled way back and there was not much future for people who did not have a West Point background when they started to reduce the military. Basically everybody who was not a West Point graduate was rifted. I saw no reason for me not to be rifted so I resigned.

Q: But you went to Korea for three years and then how did you...did you go with the First Calvary to...?

CHATMAN: No, I volunteered for Vietnam.

Q: So you went there in what '67?

CHATMAN: '67.

Q: Where did you go?

CHATMAN: I was around Saigon, 199th infantry brigade. I was first there with the civil affairs unit, no excuse me I was first there with the liaison office with the ROK army, from there I went to a civil affairs unit for the city of Saigon, then from that position I went to the 199th infantry brigade as the company commander and then as the S-5 you know what the S-5? Civil affairs.

Q: Well this is taking place when '67 to?

CHATMAN: '70.

Q: '70. So you were there during Tet?

CHATMAN: Yes.

Q: What were you doing when Tet happened? This was '68, what were you doing?

CHATMAN: I was about two blocks from the presidential palace in a BOQ when I happened. We were shifted around sort of put in different holes to fill in officer responsibilities while the fighting was going on. I never got in any kind of real combat. I was there but there were a lot of people who never had to fire anything during Tet. I was one of those people but I was there and I could hear everything. But then I transferred to the 199th and became involved with what was left of, you know it took about a year for the whole Tet thing to get cleared up, I went to the 199th I was part of that clearing up operation.

Q: It was the second Tet or whatever it was...

CHATMAN: The next year it was a mini-Tet.

Q: A mini-Tet in and around Choowang wasn't it? What was your impression or having been in Korea and then coming to Vietnam? What was your, did you see a real difference between the Vietnamese and the Koreans you were dealing with?

CHATMAN: Yeah but it is an unfair comparison because I was dealing totally with the military in Korea where I was dealing with the military and civilians in Vietnam and there it was a different ball game.

Q: What were the sort of things you were dealing with in with the civilians with in Vietnam?

CHATMAN: The last year, okay first of all as S-5 you deal with civilians. You are a military representative but your job is to deal with the civilians the military has to be friendly with in order for operations to be successful. But then, I got into the organization that was an advisory system. As a military person I was assigned to an organization that was the advisory system to the mayor of Saigon. So I was in charge of three districts in Saigon of dealing as a civilian, because we wore civilian clothes. I was a military person but I dealt strictly with civilian issues and for the districts of Saigon.

Q: What districts are these?

CHATMAN: District three, district two, district four, maybe it was three districts, let me see, district 7. There were four districts.

Q: What area does that encompass?

CHATMAN: Cholon, one part of Cholon was district seven; district four was down there by the port, district two was in the middle of Saigon and district one, I can't remember oh the racetrack. One of them was near the racetrack. So they had the big fighting during the Tet.

Q: Well how did you...the civilian government was mainly a military government wasn't it? The Vietnamese...

CHATMAN: Not in Saigon.

Q: Not in Saigon.

CHATMAN: They were all civilian. They didn't have military; if you went in the provinces the district chiefs were all military but not in Saigon.

Q: How did you find dealing with them?

CHATMAN: I didn't have any problem but I spoke Vietnamese, I could read so it made it really one might say it facilitated my official life and it facilitated my private life.

Q: I must say the Vietnamese young ladies are certainly attractive. Did you get at all involved in the problem of the GIs in Saigon, people going AWOL (absent without leave), going out on Toudoo street getting drunk and you know what have you? There were a lot of young men sort of running wild.

CHATMAN: I did but I didn't in an official capacity. I did what I thought I could do as an individual but my job was...that was not my job. My job was to help them establish a democratic type of mockery of the U.S. governments that is what my job was.

Q: What was your impression about the government of really of Saigon and how well it was sort of representative?

CHATMAN: It was representative in terms of an American thing?

Q: Yeah.

CHATMAN: It was corrupt it was totally corrupt. It didn't represent anything but what people were afraid of. People voted for the government because they were scared to death of the Communist. They weren't voting for the government because they thought the government was that much better, they were scared to death of the Communists at least that was my thoughts. We never ever had the kind of government system that we thought we had and we set up there for years and years and lied to ourselves as to how well we were doing. That was our fault.

Q: Did you find...?

CHATMAN: The caste system and all of that was bullshit we had. Remember the annual evaluation system and all of that stuff to rank the security level of each of the hamlets and stuff like that.

Q: Oh yeah. Did you sleep at night in a village and how many bodies...?

CHATMAN: Yeah right, right, right class one or I can't remember what the level was but there were three or four different levels of villages based on security.

Q: Well Saigon itself during the time you were there was not a particularly I mean the Viet Cong weren't in I mean they might have been undercover but they weren't much of a overt presence of Saigon or anything like that were they?

CHATMAN: No, except they assassinated people. I personally saw several assassinations. They were there and it that happened, but they were not like in Iraq or anything like that but the same type of thing but they were more directed towards individuals not groups of people like that kind of stuff that goes on in Iraq. They were very, very specifically person-oriented person's position type of thing.

Q: Did you have any dealings with the embassy there?

CHATMAN: We were the major primary advisors to the mayor so that became a very sensitive issue with the embassy. It was above me that dealt directly with the embassy, I was in one of the worker bees, the queen bees dealt with the embassy, I never really got...except I did an evacuation. I was basically almost on the embassy staff during an evacuation.

Q: You were there until when?

CHATMAN: The 29th of April of '75.

Q: Of '75. Did you spend your entire time in Vietnam? Or did you have any tours elsewhere or anywhere else?

CHATMAN: Yes, I was in Malaysia for two years I was in Bangladesh for six years.

Q: I know but during, between... you went to Vietnam in '67 and you were the first tour in Vietnam, how long were you there?

CHATMAN: You know we really didn't have tours. AID (Agency for International Development) just sent you there and you were there until you were sent somewhere else. Oh, in military.

Q: In the military.

CHATMAN: I extended like two or three times.

Q: So you were there with the military for how long?

CHATMAN: Three years.

Q: So this would take you to...

CHATMAN: '70.

Q: At that point you decided to get out of the military?

CHATMAN: Yeah, because the handwriting was on the wall about the future of non- West Point graduates.

Q: This is the beginning of the Vietnamization program.

CHATMAN: Also too I went down to AID when they found out that I could speak Vietnamese and they said we will get you on with AID. So that was an easy transition. I went back to the States for like two months for my security clearance to process because they wouldn't accept a military so they had to do some more investigations. So I had to go back to the States for two months. After waiting two months I was back in Vietnam.

Q: Then where were you?

CHATMAN: Do you remember a place called Cuchi?

Q: Is this when the tunnel oh no...?

CHATMAN: Right, I was in the district next to Cuchi; I was in Trang Bah, which was considered the worst of the 54 districts in Vietnam it was considered like the 53rd or 54th worst one security wise.

Q: Well this is...there were the tunnels and there was a horror sale wasn't there, I mean plantations or...?

CHATMAN: Yeah, plantations.

Q: And the Viet Cong were doing very nicely there.

CHATMAN: Right, that is where they did the [inaudible] and all that stuff.

Q: So what were you doing?

CHATMAN: I was a district senior advisor, which meant that I was the civilian that worked with the military in that district. That was my first assignment. I was there for six months and then they sent me to Bien Hoa and I started working out of Bien Hoa headquarters doing fuel work, different kinds of projects and things like that on behalf of USAID.

Q: Let's go back to the time you were in Cuchi. What were you doing, I mean what...?

CHATMAN: District senior deputy...

Q: But what does that mean?

CHATMAN: The districts, the advisory team for each one of the districts, were considered as military MAG teams (military advisory teams) and each one of those teams had a person who worked with a civilian, a civilian who worked with a civilian. I was the civilian who worked with a civilian there but all the other people on the team were military. I was the only civilian.

Q: What was the situation there? In the first place were you aware of the activity underground and the tunnels and also out in the plantation area?

CHATMAN: All you had to do was just wait until it got dark and you'd hear the activity. They would shoot up and run through the village. You could hear firefights outside the wall where I lived. All the time there was something going on, just a very bad place.

Q: Looking at it was there the possibility of moving significant military strength either American or Vietnamese in to clean it up or was that...?

CHATMAN: They did that but they had significant determination by the...like I said that was the worse, if they ranked the districts in order of the security problems the districts of Cuchi and Trang Bien were like 53, 54 out of 54 districts. So the VC (Viet Cong) there was a lot of American presence, the 9th division was there but there was also a very, very determined effort on the part of the VC to not allow that to stop their activity.

Q: Well I would think that dealing with the civilians there they must have been hold up in their bunkers and staying out of sight weren't they, because they would be the principal targets of all this VC activity?

CHATMAN: You know about the RD cadre, the rule development cadre?

Q: No.

CHATMAN: They had those people all over the place; they were getting killed like everybody else was, the soldiers. I can remember one day when one of their compounds was raided while thirteen or fourteen of them got killed in one night. They were young kids; they were like a self-defense force.

Q: Yeah.

CHATMAN: And, of course, they were all kids and not soldiers.

Q: Yeah, it was almost like a Peace Corps.

CHATMAN: All the Peace Corps wearing rifles, a little worse. Their mission was security it wasn't...

Q: I mean security but they took young kids without much experience.

CHATMAN: Right, young totally inexperienced kids. It was unfortunate.

Q: After a while what was you attitude? Did you think my God if they can't clean this place up then they aren't going to clean any place up? Or what did you think?

CHATMAN: I think I had sort of a little bit of an innocent optimism for a long time and it took me, because I guess I was a stubborn and too much of a flag waver, a lot longer time to realize that that whole idea was not working out than it should have. I think in my last several years there I was convinced the war was over and that we weren't going to make it.

Q: Well then when you moved from Cuchi where did you go?

CHATMAN: I went to Bien Hoa.

Q: There that was a very large American base; it was a main supply base, wasn't it?

CHATMAN: Right, but that area had, it was called region three and it included Saigon so our headquarters that I worked with was a USAID headquarters for region three. While it was actually the military region three we had a...I can remember his name was Robert Funkhouser, he was embassy.

Q: Dick Funkhouser?

CHATMAN: Yeah, Robert or Dick?

Q: I think maybe it is Robert but I've interviewed him a long, long time ago.

CHATMAN: But we had the ConGen (consulate general), we had a ConGen system and he was the ConGen for region two.

Q: Well then what were you doing there?

CHATMAN: Various types of projects that were sponsored by AID to get the civilians involved in a democratic system. I can't remember all those, but it was all kinds of things.

Q: As you were working with these people did you feel we were trying to impose something that wasn't going to last? You spoke Vietnamese, were you getting any feeling it was a nice idea but they just, it's just not part of the Vietnamese system?

CHATMAN: Yes, the answer is yes. But I did as I said before I think it took me a longer time to admit that than it did for a lot of other people. It was probably my fourth or fifth year before I even stated entertaining that because I was gung-ho. I had come out of the military I was gung-ho for the flag and we're going to do this. I stayed that way for an abnormally long time.

Q: Then after Bien Hoa where did you go?

CHATMAN: I went to Da Nang.

Q: You were there...?

CHATMAN: Until the end of it.

Q: Until the end?

CHATMAN: I was there until one month from the end because Da Nang fell one month before Saigon did. I was in charge of the evacuation from Da Nang and then I was in charge of the transportation for the evacuation out of Saigon.

Q: Let's take Da Nang. When you got up to Da Nang this was before all hell broke loose wasn't it?

CHATMAN: It was really started then during the prisoner exchanges. Remember the peace was supposed to be there and all these plans and such, that is when I arrived in Da Nang which was about '72ish.

Q: How did you find Da Nang?

CHATMAN: A little scarier than Saigon, there was a lot more VC activities up in that area closer to the north. I was in Quong Nam, have you ever heard of Quong Nam?

Q: No.

CHATMAN: One of the provinces, an old very historical province with a lot of historical villages and stuff like that. I got into studying Vietnamese artifacts and things like that so it was very interesting to me. But it was closer to the north so you felt a lot more threatened. The possibility of something actually happening was there, it was definitely there.

Q: You were there when I guess the initial attacks were well one was up in the...

CHATMAN: Quong Tri.

Q: Quong Tri.

CHATMAN: That was the northerly most...that is where it started.

Q: I think didn't they pull out what was the Vietnamese First Division or something.

CHATMAN: I can't remember the details.

Q: What was in Da Nang? I mean were you and your compatriots seeing it falling apart?

CHATMAN: Yep, it was falling apart.

Q: What was your impression of AID as an organization in Vietnam.

CHATMAN: It didn't have the whip that it needed to have. It had the money to give everybody, which we gave everything away, but when things did not work right we had no ability to punish or correct the situation so it wouldn't happen again. So something would happen, they changed the Vietnamese and the next guy would come and be a bigger crook than the guy before. Our military career performance system dictated that if you wanted to get ahead the system that you worked with the Vietnamese had to show some improvements or otherwise it reflected on your performance. When you got to that level everybody made sure that the system at least report wise functioned a lot better than it did when they started, because that was part of the deal. Very seldom did you see a guy say, "Well look in the year that I've been up here the situation is worse than it was when I started." That was not heard of and if you multiply that by everybody in the system each one having his part of the pie then it was a corrupt system, we weren't getting the truth out of them. I think what's more is he exhibited the lies that he told were criminal, that he had some of those bags.

Q: You were involved in the evacuation of Da Nang?

CHATMAN: Very much so.

Q: I've seen pictures, of course, of the airplanes pushing people off and all.

CHATMAN: There is a book called The Fall of Saigon that describes a lot of my participation in evacuations.

Q: What sort of things were you doing?

CHATMAN: I was trying to organize everything. Quong Ngai was in one of the southern provinces of region two.

Q: Quong Tri would be region one wouldn't it?

CHATMAN: Excuse me let me get myself together. Region one, it was a southern edge of region one. I was in Quong Ngai.

Q: It's not Quong Tri?

CHATMAN: No, no, no Quong Tri was the north. It was next to the bottom of North Vietnam. It was the southern district, the southern province of region one which was, I can't remember...

Q: Well we can pick that up.

CHATMAN: Quong Ngai, whatever it was it was a southern part but it was one of the worst provinces as far as the Viet Cong military presence and I was evacuated out of that up to Saigon. I was sent down to that province because there was no American down there. I was down there for about two weeks and the place got overrun. When I was evacuated out there were bombs being dropped, or mortars being dropped onto the airstrip. As the chopper was taking off I could see these things being blown up around us. We took off and that was the end of it. Then I was in Da Nang for about a month after that and then the same thing happened in Da Nang and we were put on the barges, they had a whole bunch of barges that came out of Da Nang and they had all the problems and things. Then when I got down to Saigon because of my experiences up there they said, "Look you've got to help with the evacuation of Saigon." So I was in charge of the embassy transportation, all the buses that took people from the liaison pick up points to the planes on time. I was the control officer and every day I set that thing up, that was my parting thing. I did that until the last night.

Q: How did you get the buses from the embassy to Tan Son Nhut Airport? I mean there must have been mobs all the time around the embassy.

CHATMAN: There were mobs around the embassy but they never picked anybody up at the embassy. There were staging points throughout the city that the buses were told to go by. Every day they had a meeting and at the meeting the various organizations would say I have so many people that I need to have picked up and taken to the airport. We would have the staging points, let's say there were ten staging points and we would say okay you have 15 people at point number one, which is on the corner of this. You have them there at six o'clock in the morning and we will send a bus. We did that for ten or twelve different places and had the buses come by, pick the people up and take them to the airport. The Vietnamese were unexplainable, did not get involved with these buses. The Vietnamese did not take American hostages for some reason, which I swore they were going to do up until the end of it and they just let this thing happen. I do not understand why they didn't interrupt them.

Q: Were you involved in getting Vietnamese employees, or government, and of course the families were terribly extended?

CHATMAN: All these people were whatever they said to be there I had no control over who was going to be there. I had the control over saying so many people had to be at this point and that was what we could pick up with the bus and the bus would go to the airport and that's the end of it. They told me the numbers that would be from each agency and I would make sure the bus was there on time and got out to the airport.

Q: You must have...if you were told 15 there must have been more than that.

CHATMAN: Yeah but surprisingly we did not have many problems with the buses and I'm not sure for the whole reason. I think a lot of people maybe did not still think it was going to happen.

Q: Did you find that there was a problem getting people out of there just personally saying I don't want to go?

CHATMAN: Big problem and that was one of the biggest problems. There were a lot of Americans. We had probably three or four days where we could not fill up the airplanes simply because there were Americans saying they did not want to go. We kept begging the Americans to get on the buses and go. There was a period where the buses went out to the airport from these rally points probably one quarter full, that's it. A lot more people could have gotten evacuated.

Q: Were you finding I know a number of people I know came back to Vietnam from Washington to get their wives or their families or their girlfriends, or what have you out? Was this...did you get involved with this?

CHATMAN: Yeah but I wouldn't know, I mean I didn't care what the name of the...the organization had to have the people there whoever they chose to be there that was up to them whether it was one of their hookers or one of their mother-in-law or girlfriend or what, that was their problem. I just had to have the bus there and then make sure the bus got to the airport and cleared it when it got back.

Q: Were your drivers reporting problems of Vietnamese authorities not allowing people on planes?

CHATMAN: Yes they were. The way that they solved that was that the guys said, "Here is $200 thousand, you put it in your pocket, you get out to the gate and you just make sure you get through." They just bribed them, the guys who were causing the problems were, that I am aware of, were the guys, the PFC, one PFC at the front gate at Tan Son Nhut who could sit there and say, "No you can't go through, and everything was stopped. So he said we will take care of him and they did.

Q: Did you get the drivers out?

CHATMAN: The drivers were mostly Americans until the Americans all ran out, then the problems started to become a little more sensitive because they were Vietnamese drivers and obviously they were taking advantage of the system, but it never fell apart, it never fell apart.

Q: So how did you get out?

CHATMAN: Helicopter about two hours before the ambassador left.

Q: Did you sense the concern that in the days that the ambassador was almost fighting the evacuation? He was...

CHATMAN: In a matter of sense that he was, he was totally against the evacuation because he believed there was panic and I also thought that for us to start taking massive amounts of Americans out very visibly so would have really panicked the Vietnamese and it didn't. Why it didn't I do not know? All it would take was a couple of ARVN soldiers in the middle of the street to stop the whole operation and it never did, it never did. I was out wandering around by myself at night before the final evaluation, I was always worried about somebody pushing me up against the side of the wall with a gun and saying you've got to get me out of here or I'm going to kill you. That was my one of my biggest worries and I was never bothered.

Q: I'm just trying to think of...did you have any particular friends or something in the Vietnamese community that you were getting out? Was there a problem of getting the Vietnamese to face up to the situation too?

CHATMAN: No, there were plenty of Vietnamese that wanted to get out of there. The biggest problem with the Americans is they didn't want to go. There were plenty of Vietnamese that wanted to leave.

Q: Were GIs, I understand that there was a significant number of essentially deserters from American military units had gone maybe even years before into the depths of Cholon or something in the black market and all that.

CHATMAN: I don't know anything about that.

Q: That wasn't an issue?

CHATMAN: Never an issue, there may have been some but I never heard that, if there was an issue there never was a problem. If you were American, if you were white looking you could get on the buses with no problem. You are supposed to have some documents or something but if somebody stopped and you were white looking they'd put you on the bus and say don't worry about it, just get out of here.

Q: Well then where did you go? You say you left just shortly...

CHATMAN: I went to Guam. I was on Guam to help with the refugees who were coming into Guam. There were several boats full of refuges that I was evacuated with. We ended up in Guam and I helped process refugees in Guam for a while. Then, where did I go, I went back to the States and worked as a coordinator for resettling refuges in the state of New York, still working with the Vietnamese.

Q: How did that work in New York?

CHATMAN: It worked fine, the volunteer agencies were all there. There were ten or twelve volunteer agencies who were responsible for resettling, finding homes and supporting all these new Vietnamese. They worked like charms.

Q: Did you get any feel for what I understand a lot of the resettlement ended up with the Vietnamese ending up in Texas and Louisiana and California and all of that? Did the people who went to New York did they pretty well stay in New York do you think?

CHATMAN: I think if you sent a Vietnamese to an extremely cold weather area that it would be much more difficult for them to stay there than it would be in another area. The people who went out to Oregon and Utah and stuff like that I don't think they lasted very long at all. First of all, there weren't that many Vietnamese out there anyway and the cold weather was pretty rough on a lot of Vietnamese. So the answer to that is I would think probably there were a lot of people who left New York and went to warmer areas simply because they were more comfortable.

Q: Well then after this period what did you do? Were you still employed by AID?

CHATMAN: Yes.

Q: What did they do with you?

CHATMAN: I was a coordinator for the refugee program in New York City, as I said, for one year, not New York City, New York State, New York and New Jersey. I was the one that all the assistants' to the volunteer agencies for resettling these people went through.

Q: Again, with New York state particularly upstate New York it's as cold as hell up there.

CHATMAN: There were a lot more people in the New York City area I imagine than there were upstate. You are right it's as cold as hell but the Vietnamese didn't have much of a choice. Once and agency said we are going to resettle you somewhere if they didn't really want to resettle they didn't get resettled anywhere else. So I mean if somebody said you are going to Rochester, New York, and you didn't want to go if you wanted to get out of the refugee program or the refugee camps what you did was you went up there and just left and that's what most of them did, they let their feet do the talking.

Q: How did you find the New York authorities regarding the refugees?

CHATMAN: I worked with the volunteer agencies, they were great I didn't deal with any of them; they dealt with the local authorities.

Q: Were the voluntary agencies pretty well organized?

CHATMAN: Very well organized. You know they had done this before; this was an old effort not with Asians but with others, Jews and other people.

Q: Well then so we are talking around '76 or so? What did you do after this?

CHATMAN: Then I went back to, where did I go? No I was assigned to Malaysia because you know about '77 or something like that there was a big influx, after the war had settled the end of the war was over, a couple of years later all of these Vietnamese decided to leave Vietnam.

Q: The boat people.

CHATMAN: The boat people. Malaysia was the focal point of all that. I went and I was the director of the refugee office in Malaysia for a year, deputy director for one year and then director for one year of the refugee office in Malaysia who processed all those people.

Q: What was happening in Malaysia with refugees? What was the attitude of the Malay government?

CHATMAN: Well the Malay government didn't want them to settle in Malaysia. That was the big thing so they put them on little isolated island and they put them on those islands temporarily where they could be processed by these voluntary agencies where they could interview them and accept them and then the voluntary agencies would ship them back to the States and find homes in the resettlement areas for them back in the States.

Q: How did that work?

CHATMAN: It worked like a dream. It was a little busy but...because we were getting some months we would get 20,000 refugees.

Q: Well if you are processing people there have to be some people who aren't processable, I mean, for one reason or another.

CHATMAN: Very few. Because some countries didn't...see what happened was there were several countries that were the big processors, like the U.S., Australia and a couple other countries really took a lot of them. The U.S. took a million or a half a million of them or something like that.

Q: Canada?

CHATMAN: In smaller numbers but there was almost a home for everybody unless the guy was a criminal or something.

Q: What happened if the guy was a criminal, what did you do?

CHATMAN: I don't really remember because there were not that many...it was very hard to...unless the guy did something in the refugee camp it was almost impossible to do anything and to prove what the person did in Vietnam.

Q: The refuges that you were seeing, the boat people, I'm familiar with what happened to so many of the boat people who ended up around Thailand, I mean they were preyed on by Thai fishermen and pirates and all that. The Malays, did this happen or was this...

CHATMAN: The Malay's were not as bad the Thais were animals to the refugees.

Q: Yeah.

CHATMAN: But see the refugees would love to stay in Thailand because they were Buddhists, they looked very Thai looking and because they looked so Chinese looking they really weren't that welcome in Malaysia because the Malay's didn't particularly like the Chinese that they had.

Q: Yeah, they had a long...

CHATMAN: So they didn't have a big deal about wanting to stay in Malaysia.

Q: They had a war on.

CHATMAN: Plus it was Muslim and they were pork eaters and all of that.

Q: So there wasn't much incentive on either side for absorption?

CHATMAN: No, no.

Q: They both wanted to get the...

CHATMAN: As long as we got them out of there the Malay's would accept them. The deal was as long as we processed them and got them out of there the Malay's would allow them to land on their shores. What they didn't want them to do was to turn them back to sea where they would inevitably die because those old boats and things like that were falling apart. That's what they didn't want them to do.

Q: So in a way it was a system that worked because everyone...we wanted to resettle them, the Vietnamese didn't want to stay there and the Malay's didn't want them there.

CHATMAN: Right, and as long as we kept shipping them out the Malay's didn't have any problems.

Q: You did that until what '78 or about?

CHATMAN: About '80 I think it was.

Q: About '80. I'm just thinking this is probably a good place to stop for this session. We will pick this up in 1980. Where did you go in sort of 1980?

CHATMAN: I went back to Washington and was on the desk for Bangladesh.

Q: Okay, well we will talk about that the next time. Great.

Today is October 11, 2006. We are talking about you came back to Washington in 1980, is that right?

CHATMAN: Yes.

Q: And you did what in '80?

CHATMAN: I came back in 1980 and I went to work on the USAID Bangladesh desk for the next year, year and a half.

Q: What were we doing in Bangladesh at the time?

CHATMAN: Trying to keep people from starving to death, that was one of the big...

Q: It's a pretty lush area isn't it?

CHATMAN: Well it wasn't lush; they were still importing rice when I first went to Bangladesh. I think before I left there in '87 they were actually exporting rice. It was still and importing rice country when I arrived there and of course, the government had a lot of problems because they had expanding population problems, they had problems with the weather, they were still in some form or fashion recovering from the 1970 whatever it was war with Pakistan. There was a whole multiplicity of problems and things that USAID was faced with.

Q: You were doing this from 1980 to about '82, was that it?

CHATMAN: '82 something like that, '81.

Q: What piece of the action, what were you dealing with?

CHATMAN: On the desk you deal with everything, as you know. So at that time whatever came from the mission we were the coordination point for USAID Washington so I was assistant desk officer, I did all the soup to nuts type of things.

Q: What were the main programs? I mean you certainly were trying to keep them from starving, what were we doing?

CHATMAN: Rice import was a big program, if I remember correctly and there were a lot of government building programs that we were trying to help the ministries to become more efficient. I don't remember just every detail.

Q: Did you get involved with the embassy of Bangladesh at all?

CHATMAN: I did because I was subsequently assigned to Bangladesh as a result of that prior assignment as a desk officer. So I went to Bangladesh and stayed for about six years.

Q: Just before we get to there how did you find working in AID and in the Department of State? How did you find that?

CHATMAN: I am a very strong as a field person. I was not as comfortable as a person working at a desk, which was of course a very big part of one's career but I had been so field oriented for so long I found that that was one of the big adjustments that I had to make.

Q: How did you find...did you get any feel for the coordination between AID and the State Department?

CHATMAN: It was very good, what little contact I had with the State desk, the State desk and the Bangladesh desk naturally talked a lot. I don't remember any problems of any kind.

Q: Well then you went out in '82 about?

CHATMAN: I think it was late '81 or early '82.

Q: You were there until what?

CHATMAN: '87.

Q: '87. Can you tell me when you got out there how did you find, let's say, what was the state of Bangladesh? The government, the economy, the people, how did you find it?

CHATMAN: Very, very not at rest. You know everything, there were so many problems and the government was so strained for resources; resources included money but also for people that were also really dedicated to doing something about it. The change was like building highways in Washington. By the time you build something to correct what you are planning for today you are ten years behind. It was the same way there. I think they were establishing programs like that that were good for the moment but never addressed the longer-term growth problem.

Q: What was your particular job?

CHATMAN: I worked in the training section at AID. The training section and I also was a project manager for several projects. My big project was a satellite remote sensing project where it was run in order to try to predict the catastrophic floods and rain problems that Bangladesh is faced with all the time.

Q: Was that all tied to the monsoons?

CHATMAN: Well of course it's tied to the monsoons because that is when most of the damage comes but what I'm saying is it was really tied to just bad weather. If it was a non-monsoon type of problem I guess theoretically you could have flooding also but the idea was to have a warning system that would allow people to evacuate in time to get out of the low-lying areas so that they wouldn't be killed. There were times when 50 thousand people in one year were killed simply because they did not leave or did not know about leaving an area in time of a flooding problem.

Q: You look at that and basically Bangladesh is one big delta isn't it?

CHATMAN: Yes it is. It is below, most of it is at sea level or below sea level I guess.

Q: Well then, I am a villager sitting in the middle of that. Where can you go, you can get a warning...?

CHATMAN: That was the problem because the people who died in those other floods were people who were living in obviously dangerous lower areas but had no place else to live. So they chose those areas because that's where they could get land. For a couple of years they were okay but every couple years then you have this massive flood because the flooding doesn't really occur in Bangladesh. It occurs as a result of the draining of the water down through the Himalayans, which ends up like a bowl in Bangladesh.

Q: Yeah, well what could you do about that? I mean the population is getting bigger and the floods are there, they are going to be there.

CHATMAN: Bangladesh has done miracles about birth control. It's not home yet but I think they've gotten down to something like half of what they were before and average child per family, some really unbelievable number. It was mostly thanks to a lot of work put in by AID and other goers.

Q: Well this is during the Reagan administration, isn't it?

CHATMAN: To tell you the truth I can't remember. I assume because Reagan was in officer for eight years, it probably was.

Q: It would be you know the Republican administration has always been very uncomfortable with birth control.

CHATMAN: Yeah, you are right. I don't remember them making any threats about just cutting off funding to birth control programs like Bush has but it was a major program. I don't remember that kind of sensitivity because that was one of our most successful and most heavily managed programs in our mission.

Q: As a training officer how did you find the Bangladeshi students that you had?

CHATMAN: Like any other students there were some very, very good ones, there were some mediocre ones, there were some very bad ones. The problem always in training courses and things like that is if you have people that are struggling so much with just existing it's really hard to train them because their mind is occupied with a lot of other things. I thought that that was one of the problems, we just, it was generic to the system because that's the way life has been for years and years and it wasn't going to change during my tenure.

Q: Over the six years you were there how did the warning system work? Were you doing that almost the whole time?

CHATMAN: At least four years of it. It worked excellent, it worked excellent, and many times as a matter of fact it worked so good what it did was it actually caused some controversy because the warning system was not under the same ministry as the weather management. So whatever the system was that predicted the weather, it wasn't under the same ministry and the weather predicting formal system did not have anywhere the new resources because AID came into Bangladesh and completely updated this one office so it had top technology ability to predict the weather conditions especially flooding conditions. It did it you know there were about I can't remember the number of sensors that were placed throughout the country but they were placed out and their readings were read by a satellite and there were obviously models that once certain data came up in a certain connection during a certain time that something was going to happen. They could predict when that was going to happen by the data. The other system could not do that and, of course, that created a lot of problems.

Q: Was there any way of integrating the two? Were you working on that?

CHATMAN: I don't remember us in my office working on that. It was sort of a, not by us, but the Bangladeshi...

Q: Its true the Bangladeshi's...

CHATMAN: The Bangladesh government had its own politics and they were very happy, the larger part of the government was very happy with this, it was called SPARSO (Space Research and Remote Sensing Organization), the ability of this organization because we brought in millions of dollars worth of equipment, we trained all the technicians in the states and set up a really, really state of the art system for them to manage. It ran very well.

Q: While you were there were you able to see the results of the warnings of floods and that?

CHATMAN: Several times they were given complete credit for warning for giving advanced well to one or two days ahead of the formal system of upcoming floods which obviously saved a lot of, I'm not sure how many lives, but it obviously saved a lot of damage and injury.

Q: How did the people get out? Where did they go?

CHATMAN: There is an emergency relief type of program. I'm not really sure how well it worked but that was a separate office that did that. The best thing to do was go to the obvious higher land. There are certain areas where every time you get a trickle you have that kind of problem. What I think most of them did was to just get out of the lowest level areas.

Q: Was there much work going on to regulate the floods, dams, levees, that sort of thing?

CHATMAN: There was as far as I knew there was nothing done to try to regulate because the problem was impossible, that part of the problem. I don't remember any effort to try and do that because as I mentioned it was an Indian problem, Bangladesh was the victim but the real source of doing anything about it was up in the Himalayan's. What are you going to do dam off those mountain streams and such? It would rain for five or six days without stopping sometimes. It would do that. You can imagine how much water that can feed and at some places it was at sea level.

Q: How did you find the Bangladesh government?

CHATMAN: Probably one of the most corrupt that I have ever had to work with but corruption was somewhat of a justification, there is never a justification really, yes there is. Corruption was an understandable corruption because the salaries of the people who were playing all these key roles that were basic for us to make any improvements in the government were not being paid enough to even live on. So what happens, the normal thing that happens when that goes on people will do a good job but they have to get paid for it. If they don't get it out of their salary they'll get it some other way. That happened all the time and it still happens.

Q: Did that interfere with your work and all?

CHATMAN: I am sure it interfered with our work but it became such a part of the work that everybody sort of understood it and worked around it. We did not have an anti-corruption effort although we knew corruption was a major problem.

Q: Yeah.

CHATMAN: I guess the government running is better than one not running at all.

Q: Oh yeah.

CHATMAN: Even if it is corrupt and has got a lot of other things going on.

Q: What about you've got these rather fancy sensors and all and these are way up country I would think there would be a problem of having them stolen and all of that?

CHATMAN: Well that was a major problem and I can remember instances when what had happen was they had them first of all enclosed in barbed wire but that is never a problem for somebody who doesn't have anything else to do but try to steal something. There was a lot of work done with the local leaders to explain to them that there was no value on these things on the market but there was an extreme reduction in the ability of the government to stabilize if someone moved these things. I think while there was some pilferage I don't think that that was a major problem. One of the problems was that things would just stop working. We would have to send someone, a technician, up there to see what had happened. There were nine of them throughout the country.

Q: Did you live in Dhaka?

CHATMAN: I lived in Dhaka.

Q: How was it there? How was life there?

CHATMAN: I now am married and have been married for the last 22 years to a lady from Dhaka. I had no problems at all. A lot of Americans were threatened by...

Q: Who's threatening?

CHATMAN: It's I think when you're in a country where you can see poverty but then see a lot of improvements past the poverty that that becomes fairly easy to deal with. But when you are in a country where you see poverty and go behind poverty and there's just more poverty then it becomes a little threatening. So people became very isolated, many of my friends had no Bangladeshi friends at all and claimed that that was impossible to have friends with Bangladeshi's. My boss when I first arrived there my orientation gave me this big spiel about how it was impossible really to have Bangladesh friends. I immediately found that I had no problem at all in finding friends in Bangladesh. They weren't the rickshaw drivers or the rice paddy workers and stuff like that, they were the middle and upper class Bangladeshi's but I had no problem in finding a large group of friends.

Q: How did you meet your wife?

CHATMAN: Through a friend that was married to a Bangladeshi also.

Q: How did you find, did this give you an entrï¿½e into Bangladesh society, I mean, into the family?

CHATMAN: I don't think much more than where I had been before because I learned how to speak Bangla. I was very willing to go out in the communities and stay, I was willing to go to houses, I was willing to deal with some of the uncomfortable situations that you deal with when you have dinner at eleven o'clock at night and you are accustomed to having it at seven. There are a lot of things.

Q: Did you get any feel for...it was a Muslim society wasn't it? What type of Muslim society was it?

CHATMAN: If you rated three levels Saudi Arabia would be the most strict, then Bangladesh would fall next and then the bottom level would be someplace like Malaysia and Indonesia where the system is there but it's not nearly as strict. Bangladesh was sort of the middle of it, it was restrictive but they were strict but nothing like Saudi Arabia or those countries. That's the best way I can explain it.

Q: Did the religion affect you at all?

CHATMAN: Obviously it affected us I mean it controlled the time that we went to work, the days that we worked, it controlled how people thought about things that we were interested in doing for them, it controlled everything. It was a major factor in any kind of decision we needed to take.

Q: How did you find relations between the embassy and AID?

CHATMAN: I found it was very good and a big part of that was we lived, we had a common club and there was a lot of, and the marine house was also very popular so there was a lot of fraternizing outside the duty hours.

Q: Did you get over to India? Did you get a feel about Bangladesh relations and all?

CHATMAN: Yeah and it was, of course, a strain like they are and have been for years. I don't think that they were impossibly strained but the Indians still are a little think that the Bangladeshi's are their backyard or what do you call it their country cousins or something like that.

Q: I'm just trying to think in the '80s were there any political events that impacted on you?

CHATMAN: Yeah there were hartels, which are riots, where political parties just stopped government. They have them on a regular schedule and they can be very dangerous because these people, crowds of people like that get a little flaky, get a little over...

Q: It is sort of like going amok.

CHATMAN: Right, go amok. Fortunately when I was always afraid of this and it never ever happened even in Vietnam when we were evacuated from Vietnam, they never attacked Americans, they never attacked foreigners. I was always worried that something would happen in Bangladesh because first of all there were so many people that there is no force in Bangladesh that could have made any control if the crowd went amok. It just would not happen. The crowd would have had to decide not to deal with foreigners and that was the only thing that saved us because the moment they wanted to deal with foreigners that was the end of it. We would have no control over that. That was the same thing in El Salvador that was the same thing in Vietnam, the same thing in Bangladesh as I've just said.

Q: Well you were there in six years and you said the first four years you were working on this flood control system. What did you do the next two years?

CHATMAN: I may have, no it was four years. I worked in training. I remember it is very easy to have more than one project so I can't remember the timing of the projects but I was a training officer and I also worked on this project. I think I was the training officer first and then went to the project when one of the guys who was on the project rotated somewhere else.

Q: Then you left there when? In 1980?

CHATMAN: '87.

Q: Where did you go?

CHATMAN: I went to El Salvador.

Q: You were in El Salvador from when to when?

CHATMAN: 1987 until 1994.

Q: So another good solid time?

CHATMAN: I spent several long time periods. In most of my countries I spent more than what was the normal tour.

Q: In 1987 when you got to El Salvador what was the situation?

CHATMAN: It was in the middle of a guerrilla war, right in the middle of it. Of course you had security everywhere. You had vehicles with two-inch thick plastic lining the whole vehicle that made them weigh a ton and made them impossible, you could never roll a window down so if the air conditioning went out you were pooh-pooh out of luck.

Q: I know it.

CHATMAN: I will never forget that.

Q: Particularly in a place like El Salvador is not much fun.

CHATMAN: But there were so many other positive things. The Salvadorians are some of the nicest people in the world. That certainly outweighed to a significant degree the problems over there. I was in San Salvador and I had a very nice house, enjoyed life and worked very hard.

Q: You were in El Salvador from '87 to?

CHATMAN: '87-'94.

Q: '87-'94. Your job, what were you doing while you were there?

CHATMAN: I was working in the training office, the office that handled training for the entire time I was there.

Q: When you say training, what are we talking about?

CHATMAN: Projects that had in-country training by USAID and also the participatory training where we sent people back to the States where they received training here. I worked on both of those projects.

Q: Let's talk about in country training first. What sort of things were we working on?

CHATMAN: Probably the greatest most significant contribution that I made to the whole Foreign Service system, the AID aspect, was what I did in El Salvador, because I had under my desk or on my desk, a project probably worth about $26 million which was set aside to train teachers in the ministry of education to become more efficient in their classrooms throughout the country. The training included in country training and training included overseas training. It was an exciting experience because I was able to as you are able to in most emergency situations people don't follow you around and ask you to provide so many reports and details about when you are trying to do, they just want something done. So for several years we had a large pot of money where we were able to do some experimental projects and reach out and do things that we would never have been able to do under normal circumstances.

As a result of that, I completely set up a project that was called, well I completely revised a project that was already set up when I got there, it was called A Central American Peace Scholarship Program. Basically it was money set aside to train students from various USAID funded Latin American countries. We had like I said $27 million to do this and our objective was to improve the training, the ability of the ministry of education, that was soup to nuts, computer systems, buildings, everything you could think of. We constructed probably 3 or 400 schools throughout the entire country. There were all kinds of aspects.

I was involved with the teacher training and liaisoned with the ministry of education. We created a number of projects that just turned out to be 100 percent successful. They were projects that people swore up and down when we started that they would not work, to include the minister of education. We had programs with massive numbers and when I say massive numbers we are talking about probably 60 or 70 teachers in a group were sent to the States for two months for extensive training. When I first started this idea out the minister of education herself told us that those teachers would do nothing but go to the U.S. and shop. She wasn't against the program and thought that there might be some benefits but the bottom line was that they were going to spend more time shopping than they were anything else. So we started with that on the table as a common but as the highest-level educational person in the country.

What happened was fortunately we had a really outstanding contractor who was contracted to take care of this program. We sat down and I was able to draw from my experience in AID from the previous twenty years or whatever I had and we designed programs where we got the absolute greatest amount of favorable reaction and results that we could have ever dreamed of. Because we knew that if the teachers were, first of all we were convinced that the teachers honestly wanted to do better, that was the bottom line. They were actually concerned about the students.

Based on that we brought them to the States. When they got off the train or plane in the States their program was planned minute, by minute, by minute for the entire two months. We kept them so busy, not for the sake of being busy, but for the fact that we believed that they could have learned, they could make a lot of changes at least on what they learned in the States if they learned it properly and had a lot of practice time before they came back. Because when they came back they had to deal with the no-change society. So part of the project was not only to pass on the information but also to help them understand how they had to deal with the resistance and change once they got back and also how we had to help them deal with the resistance to change. For example, we understood very well that if you take the staff of a principal of school and send all the staff to training you don't send the principal the training isn't going to be effective once the teachers get back because the principal won't let it happen.

So the key thing was that as soon as you had a significant number of students trained from a particular school, the principal had to go. Then the principal took the leadership role of implementing the objectives of this program once its teachers got back. It worked out beautifully to the point where the teachers started to do the training of their colleagues based on the training they had received in the States in El Salvador. They trained the entire country.

Q: There was civil war going on, were the guerrillas trying to disrupt the school system or was that sort of left alone?

CHATMAN: Let me think about that answer. The guerrillas had their own school system. They had not a ministry but a person who was in charge of education for the guerrilla system. I don't think they bothered, well there were areas that they controlled of course the areas where they controlled they bothered the system but I was aware also of areas where they controlled that they allowed the local ministry to have people there and let them teach. I am also aware that in some areas that they probably did interfere with their educational system. There were certain areas where we couldn't go to because of guerrilla activities.

Q: What was your impression of the Salvadorians particularly the teachers you were working with on this?

CHATMAN: Hardworking, honest and really dedicated to doing something to improve the kids. That was what was so encouraging because we knew if we had those kinds of people we could get something done.

Q: I must say that we have a significant Salvadorian population right here in Washington and these certainly are hardworking people.

CHATMAN: They are great people. Their reputation among the Latinos is very, very, probably the hardest working.

Q: They seem to be very polite and hardworking.

CHATMAN: Very hardworking.

Q: Were we trying to put in the equivalent political indoctrination or were we trying to keep this whole project to be as sort of non-political as possible?

CHATMAN: I am not aware of more than a few acts of political situation because we resisted it to the hilt. There were times when it just came down and said, "Look there is somebody that we have to just get trained, it means something to us in some other sector," and we did so without any problem. But I don't remember that as being any overwhelmingly or negative influence, the level of it was so minor that I don't remember it having any effect on our program.

Q: Did you find then subject matter; were we pushing any particular line or anything?

CHATMAN: No, no, I do not remember because we did have a textbook writing part of it. That was set up and decided before I got there so I don't remember whether that was part of the political aspect of it. I'm sure it was because if AID gets involved with something its got politics in it just like everything else so I'm sure democracy is the greatest was somewhere in the theme of the books or hidden in the text.

Q: Were you able to get out much to the schools?

CHATMAN: I went all the time. As a matter of fact, that was probably what my claim to fame was that I was very, very field oriented and really knew what was going on in the school systems. I would just get in a vehicle and just drive for a couple of days and just stop at schools and not tell anybody I was coming. The worst thing you can do is tell somebody you are coming because everybody would have it prepared, organized, all the kids would be there, the books would be in order and everything would be there. I would never tell them I was coming to visit with the exception of where we wanted to talk to the teachers or do something and then you had to tell everybody we were coming.

Q: Well how did you find, I mean, can you tell me I don't know if there is such a thing but what a village school is like?

CHATMAN: A typical school, which is a series of classrooms with key teachers and a principal's office somewhere at the end of it. I mean that is sort of a generalization but that is basically what it was. The big thing with the Salvadorians was that the local community, the mothers or fathers, were usually very much involved with the school system and that was important, very important. Of course, they would have to be because the school would sponsor things and the mothers and fathers would have to cook and do things to help the principal, the principal could never do all that stuff.

Q: How did you see Salvadorian society at that time and was it changing? If a kid got a good education through the school system one, could they go fairly far? And two, did it make a difference in so far as changing their lives?

CHATMAN: I'm sure it made a difference but the politics were there also so to get some of the jobs and some of the things you really had to have some political pull. I don't think that the Salvadorians were at a point where the smartest students got the best jobs. I don't think they were there. There was a lot of politics.

Q: But did you feel that good teaching was making a difference?

CHATMAN: I absolutely felt that good teaching was making a difference. We were at the level the problems were so significant that having a teacher show up in a classroom five days a week was a major accomplishment because some of those teachers were drawing a salary and not showing up in the classroom. That is why I would never tell them when I was coming to the classes, coming to visit the schools, because we wanted to find out where teachers were being paid and not showing up at the schools.

The program made a difference; it really set a fire under everybody. It made a big difference in their attitude. Unfortunately I wish that I was able to have done some measuring before this system got started and then did some measuring four or five years after it was in motion to see what really happened because I can't believe there were not major changes when you had people actually in the classrooms with a curriculum and with the knowledge on how to present that curriculum whether or not there would not be significant changes just as a result of that fact. Before the program there were not those kinds of scenarios in the schools.

Q: Was there a pretty good system of moving from the school system up through the high school up to college and all or not?

CHATMAN: Yeah, but one of the problems was a lot of the high schools covered large areas and transportation became some of the problems. Their big drop out rate was at the high school level and I'm not sure if there were, well I don't think there were a sufficient number of high schools that really covered things as well as they should.

Q: Were there, did you find yourself, you'd been in Vietnam, did you find yourself in danger as far as traveling around?

CHATMAN: I can remember talking with guerrilla leaders, I mean I had this rare opportunity as a civilian to go in and talk with guerrilla leaders during the war. I can remember going with one of the ministry of education people and being the first American to go into a completely guerrilla controlled area, for years it had been controlled by the guerrillas. We were in a truck and as we rolled down the road you know in those areas like that where you don't have reliable transportation everybody just waves down a vehicle, if you have space in the back of the truck people just get in the back of the truck. We had a truck so we were carrying guerrillas with AK-47s up and down this road and they never asked us who we were or what we were doing. I didn't really feel threatened even though there was obviously a problem but I don't think that they would...I went because I don't think they would have bothered me as an American.

Q: How did you find the embassy there? Did they pay much attention to what you were doing?

CHATMAN: Yes but not, I'm not sure at what level they were. I'm sure that anytime you're a political entity and you are in a country living under some really strict conditions that you really worry about what the young kids are being taught but I'm not sure to what degree they followed. I'm sure there is section in the embassy that followed education or something, somebody, some junior officer, but they never really were that...

Q: No that's not really very high on anybodies...

CHATMAN: They were worried about training for some of their key professors and stuff like that in some of the big schools. I think probably the politics came into a lot of people going to seminars and overseas short-term training and that kind of stuff. I'm sure the politics got into that because a lot of the embassy had people that they wanted to make sure they got trained. They also had their own funds to do it; they didn't always go through us.

Q: How did you find the ministry of education?

CHATMAN: Outstanding. I was really, really impressed and thought that the guys that I worked with there were four regions and I worked directly with the regional chief who was my basic counterpart. I thought to a man that they were super outstanding. I spent many; many hours with all of them and still twenty years later are still very, very friendly with them through other people. I don't see them any more.

Q: Where do they come from? Were they part of the, in El Salvador had there been or was there, is there an elite?

CHATMAN: These guys were people who had either grown up in the ministry of education as a profession and earned their positions and a couple of them were political appointees for certain. But I'm not sure how to answer that question.

Q: Were there women in the ministry of education?

CHATMAN: Many, many women, not in the senior leadership positions, our program really helped that. Most of the teachers are women, 99 percent of the teachers are women. 99 percent of the supervisors are men. The classroom teachers are almost all women at that time; the supervisors were almost all men.

Q: This has probably changed now hasn't it?

CHATMAN: I would imagine that there are a lot more women because that is one of the things that we pushed was to have more women in everything. I would imagine, I just don't know.

Q: Was there an Indian population there or a different I don't know...?

CHATMAN: Indigenous Indian?

Q: Mayan or something like that?

CHATMAN: No, not where we were. As a matter of fact there is very limited Mayan's in El Salvador, there were some Guatemalans among other things, Guatemala is full of them. I'm sure they were somewhere. The minute you say the word you'll find a family somewhere but I don't think there was a significant population.

Q: Did military operations interfere with your work?

CHATMAN: No, no.

Q: How about immigration because during this period there was quite a flood of people from not just El Salvador but elsewhere in Central America going to the United States? Did that...

CHATMAN: I don't remember that having any affect except we were always worried about people coming on the training programs and not coming back. That was a minor, minor problem in terms of what we thought it would be. You know you get a person over here and they've got relatives here already they just don't come back. That happened but very, very seldom.

Q: You did that for about seven years?

CHATMAN: Almost, six, six plus, yes.

Q: That must have been, did you find the Salvadorians was it a nice community?

CHATMAN: I absolutely loved El Salvador. I was totally at home. I had a good relationship with everybody I worked with, I had a good relationship with people I didn't work with and also in most of the countries that I had been in you could really not have much of a relationship with some of the really uneducated lower class people because it would become a problem. In El Salvador it didn't make any difference; Salvadorians were strong at all levels. The Bangladesh, for example, if you became too friendly with a poor person all of a sudden you found 100 other poor people waiting at your door with some kind of excuse or some need of urgent help. That wasn't that way in El Salvador.

Q: When you left there it was in '90...?

CHATMAN: 4.

Q: Had peace come about by that time?

CHATMAN: Peace came back in '90 or'91.

Q: Did that make a difference in what you were doing?

CHATMAN: Oh yeah but it had been...the actual day of peace had been in progress for a year plus so it didn't just all of a sudden happen one day. Peace was being built up and I can remember the day that peace actually started that we were in a training session in the States and what an emotional moment it was for all the Salvadorians, it was just tears, most of them had lost a relative or somebody in the war, they had been dislodged or displaced or whatever you want to call it because of the war and a lot of other things. It was a very emotional event and remember the peace was in phases. The army just didn't put down its weapons, it put down their weapons in phases like everybody from a certain area from September first to September 30 had to turn in their weapons and there was a process that they had to go through, then next group went through it. It was a process of maybe 18 months or something before the war; the actual treaty went into effect.

Q: In your program being basically a benign one were you as these areas opened up were you able to go in there, work on the schools and bring their teachers up to...?

CHATMAN: Yes and that was one of the big, that car ride that I told you about that was one of those periods. We could have not done that when the hard-core fighting was going on. I also became very, very friendly trying to work with their school system with the people that ran their guerrillas school system and did and was successful in that and got in some cases we trained some of their guerrillas in our programs. We were able to make that happen.

Q: How did that work?

CHATMAN: We were able to get X combatants, a lot of them had been wounded, into a special program that we organized and it was a different, I don't think it was anywhere nearly as successful, these guys had a lot of problems. We didn't realize how serious some of the problems were, just living with other people problems. By the time I got, let's see I'm trying to think, the National university we cracked that particular problem and actually got the university, which was a very, very communist oriented university to actually start sending professors and students to our program which was a major breakthrough.

Q: Yeah in Latin America and other places universities tend to be Marxist as soon as they graduate they turn the other way but the faculties, of course, have subscribed to the Marxist philosophy and they'd be a hard nut to crack.

CHATMAN: Yeah but everybody wanted training in the States and what we tried to do was to...of course all of their political motives for sending people to the States but I remember it was a big celebration almost for us on the day that we were actually allowed to go to the National university and talk to the president about training. It was a major day and I lead that effort, I was very, very proud of myself for that particular process, it was a very, very successful effort that got a lot of good publicity for us.

Q: By the time you left were you concerned with the war being over so nobody is going to pay attention and there goes the money and all of that?

CHATMAN: No because the money had increased as a result of trying to support the peace process so I mean that was not the problem. The money problem came later on when it became obviously peaceful that's when you don't get the attention that you had before. Just like when we were in Vietnam, we had almost unlimited funds because everything was on a panic situation and no questions were asked, a lot of inspections weren't done, a lot of money was wasted.

Q: Then by the time you left things were going along very nicely weren't they?

CHATMAN: They were going along very nicely in terms of the peace settlement and the relocation of all these soldiers. Remember, when you do that you end up with thousands of people on both sides not being needed in the military effort any more but still having to live, families to support and things like that. That became a major problem, which is one of the problems it is faced with right now, big gangs and such.

Q: Well then in '94 where did you go?

CHATMAN: I came back to the office of human resources development in USAID.

Q: What did that mean?

CHATMAN: Training. AID tried to establish a training center that would provide training support to all of the projects in AID regardless of what area they were in. It never really worked very well.

Q: Was this training for Americans going out as opposed to bringing people in?

CHATMAN: No it was mission-based training where it was in country training and overseas training where people came to the States also.

Q: I mean these would be what we call Foreign Service nationals or...

CHATMAN: Yeah, participatory training is what they call it.

Q: Yeah, I would think that to over centralize this would make it difficult because you really have to think about the nationality and how people react.

CHATMAN: It never worked because the regions kept their own training systems. The idea was that we were supposed to go back and be a central facility for all the regions. The regions never let go of all their training, that they were still centralizing the regions.

Q: It probably made good sense not to work out?

CHATMAN: Now that I look back and I think probably so because we never would have had the ability to have the kind of...see they had people hired under their own RASA contracts to do something like that to do training under their control. Who would want to take those people and give them to another entity that did not deal directly with the country, that doesn't make sense.

Q: Well this is a problem that it gets...

CHATMAN: It was politically incorrect. It was totally political and not practical, it would never work.

Q: How long did you do that? From '94 until...?

CHATMAN: From '94 until I retired in '98, four years.

Q: Did you find that frustrating?

CHATMAN: No, not frustrating, just that AID politics got into that too.

Q: Can you explain when you say AID politics?

CHATMAN: AID has always had a large number of people from the Department of Agriculture working as AID staff. The reason that those people are working in that arrangement is that AID can claim that they have smaller staffing levels when obviously that is baloney because what happens is all they do is just put the money into a project that allows them to hire or make arrangement with the Department of Agriculture to, what do you call it, RASAs, or agreements between agencies where we pay all their salaries and in fact paid them a lot more than they pay regular AID people and they become AID staff people. So you have hundreds of them, literally thousands of those people working in AID.

Q: Were they a class a part in a way?

CHATMAN: Yeah because their loyalty was to the Department of Agriculture. One of the missions of AID is to develop self-sufficiency and independence. If that becomes a mission then what you try to do as a person running a project is you try to make sure that whatever you do for the country its absorbed into the capacity of the country so that they can repeat that same thing without you around later on. If you have people that are key to that process and who lose jobs if that process is successful, like the Department of Agriculture people, they don't ever want to let go of those reins, they want to provide the resources in a way that they will always be needed. See AID didn't care because I'm a direct hire with AID. If my program was successful and I wasn't needed in that country any more no sweat I would go to another country. The RASA people once they are not needed then they were lost and they were not regular Department of Agriculture people so that if they lost their jobs out here then they lost them altogether and that became the politics of what was going on unfortunately. I mean obviously...

Q: You would never work your way out of a job.

CHATMAN: No, I'm not saying that made the projects unsuccessful it just lowered the level of success that the projects could have had because those people were not in the ballgame for self-sufficiency for anybody and that was very obvious to me.

Q: Well of course this is a problem. What AID is supposed to do is essentially go in, help the people and then we move away.

CHATMAN: Move on, move on up. When you have such a large percentage of your staff actually doing this kind of agenda then it...I'm not criticizing them because they were excellent people. They were very, very qualified and what they did was very good, but they did not have very much energy on this particular issue I just got through explaining. Our level of issue was high on that but not theirs.

Q: Well then you retired in what '98?

CHATMAN: Yes.

Q: What have you been doing since?

CHATMAN: I wrote a very detailed family history of my family who grew up in Oklahoma which we are working on now so to get it published. I also for the last three and a half years have been working with my wife on our urgent care clinic that we opened in Loudoun County.

Q: A what?

CHATMAN: An urgent care clinic.

Q: Oh yeah.

CHATMAN: My wife is a physician; a general practitioner, internist and we began assembling our ideas to take on this project at the end of 2003. We finally opened a clinic last year, we are almost finished with our first year and that has taken up my whole time for about the last three years, its been full time, basically that and my history writing stuff and then just enjoying being retired.

Q: Well how did you find it in Loudoun County? Was there...?

CHATMAN: That was about the 40th location we visited. We finally found an ideal place.

Q: Where in the Loudoun County area?

CHATMAN: Do you know where South Riding is?

Q: No.

CHATMAN: If you were on 50 (route), as soon as you can get on 50 from out here you go west on 50 about 30 miles and stop you would be at our office.

Q: What's it called?

CHATMAN: Stoneridge.

Q: Stoneridge.

CHATMAN: Have you heard of Chantilly?

Q: Yes.

CHATMAN: Well it is six miles on 50, 50 runs through Chantilly, right?

Q: Yes.

CHATMAN: Six miles further on 50, then after you leave Chantilly about five miles further on 50. It is a booming, it's the largest growing County in the United States. They are building housing everywhere.

Q: Why not? Well this must keep you busy. Anyway, do you keep up with your AID contacts at all?

CHATMAN: No, I really had no desire to maintain contact with AID after I left.

Q: Yeah, I was...

CHATMAN: I didn't want to ever think about going back to doing any consultancy work.

Q: Did you have any feel by the time you left about whether AID was a different game than the one you'd entered?

CHATMAN: Yeah, it was changing because it was changing into where everything was contracted out. When I first went into AID we had a lot of staff people actually working on the projects where now AID was lowering its numbers but actually having more people by paying for the people out of a contract. You didn't change the number of people AID paid for, it just changed the number of people that AID had to claim existed on their roles when they went to Congress.

Q: I think I asked you this before in an earlier time but by the time you left one of the things that has disturbed me a bit about AID is that particularly in Africa but in other places, it has become an adjunct of a sort of university, a university sends a team to do a survey and it's great for the grad students but it doesn't really advance the cause of the people you are trying to help. Did you find an educational field that there was an over use of this survey system by universities?

CHATMAN: No, I'm not sure if I understand what you are saying because I thought that measuring things was one of the most important things that we had to do because we had to determine what were the priorities you had. If you had some idea of what the situation was, the only way to do that was to have some form of evaluation survey and measurement.

Q: I think maybe what I'm trying to get at is that say the University of Michigan or something, the school of whatever, would send a team in to do a survey and have its grad students do this, taking considerable amount of money away from the AID budget for that place and then leave and then maybe not much would be done after the survey was done.

CHATMAN: Well but the survey that is not their fault. If they developed the data that they are supposed to then the follow up thing is for AID to decide to fund to develop a project or sector and fund it not. That would be AIDs problem. I think what you are eluding to is that obviously a university comes into this ballgame just like everybody else does, what can I get out of it for me? What we have to do is make sure the contract, make sure that AID gets everything out of it that they want to get and the contractor if they can squeeze something else in in addition to that that is their benefit or if there are common causes that we can deal with well both of us can benefit by it that is fine. But I mean if that happened it's our fault in the contract process of not setting up the guidelines so that would not happen. That is all a contracting issue to me. But you are right, if you don't pay attention to the contract that'll happen.

Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop.

CHATMAN: Okay.

Q: I want to thank you very much.

End of interview